

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SANA 0747

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y TEXT (PARA 8)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, YE
SUBJECT: YAR UNDER GHASHMI

BEGIN SUMMARY: GHASHMI REMAINS A MYSTER TO MOST YEMENIS, WITH HIS INTENTIONS AND TIMETABLE A MATTER OF MUCH UNCETAIN DEBAT. SOME ARE WILLING TO SAY, AFTER HIS FIVE MONTHS IN OFFICE, THAT HE IS MORE INTELLIGENT THAN THEY THOUGHT AND HE SEEMS. THEY SAY HE IS ONLY WAITING FOR THE RIGHT TIME TO MAKE HIS MOVE TO THE RIGHT. WE INCLINE CAUTIOUSLY TO THIS VIEW, WITHOUT, HOWEVER, COMMITTING OURSELVES TO ANY OPTIMISTIC FORECAST OF HIS FUTURE. OTHERS WONDER IF HIS LACK OF ACTION DOES NOT MEAN HE IS A CAPTIVE OF OTHERS, UTTERLY IN DOUBT OF HIMSELF, OR SIMPLY A MAN WITHOUT ANY PROGRAM EXCEPT TO SAY IN POWER. ONE THING IS CLEAR TO ALL: GHASHMI REMAIN AN UNPOPULAR AMBIGUOUS AND SUSPECT FIGURE. END SUMMARY:

1. AHMAD HUSAYN AL-GHASHMI'S NAME AND PICTURE HAVE BECOME AS UBIQUITOUS IN NEWSPAPER AND RADIO AND TV BROADCASTS AS HAMD'I'S WAS ONCE, BUT AIR OF UNREALITY CLINGS TO HIS RULE.

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2. GHASHMI IS SUCH AN UNPREPOSSESSING FIGURE, A SEEMINGLY INARTICULATE MAN, HE HAS FAILED TO PROJECT ANY NEW VISION OR IDENMMTUTT FOR HIS GOVERNMENT OR THIS SOCIETY. HE SUFFERS IN PUBLIC ESTEEM ALSO BECAUSE HE LOOKS UNINTELLIGENT, PARTLY BECAUSE OF HIS HABIT OF BREATHING RATHER HEAVILY THROUGH HIS OPEN MOUTH WHILE LISTENING AND TWISTING A HEAVY SET OF

WORRY BEADYS AROUND AND AROUND IN HIS HANDS. HIS ILL-CUT UNIFORM, WITH A CHEST OF UNKNOWN RIBBONS, THE STORN, TROOPER HAT HE NEVER TAKES OFF, INDOORS OR OUT, THE HITLER MUSTACHE HE AFFECTS, ALL ADD TO IMPRESSION THAT HE SIMPLY ISN'T VERY BRIGHT.

3. OTHERS SAY HE IS GOOD LISTENER, WHO HAS CALLED IN MANY FACTIONS AND INSISTS ON SPECIFICS, BUT KEEPS HIS OWN COUNSEL AND GIVES IMPRESSION THAT HE IS THE MAN IN CHARGE. AGAIN AND AGAIN WE HEAR THAT HE HAS SAID HE WILL TAKE CARE OF SECURPTY AND MILITARY AND LEAVE GOVERNMENT TO MORE SOPHISTICATED AND QUALIFIED CIVILIANS. THE GROUP OF PERSONS WHO SUPPORT HIM SAY, NOT WITHOUT EDGE, THAT THIS ROLE IS INTELLIGENT CHOICE FOR MAN OF HIS CALIBER AND BACKGROUND.

4. SUPPORTERS ALSO SAY HE HAS A PROGRAM, AND IT CONSISTS OF TURN TO RIGHT AFTER HE CONSOLIDATSS HIS POER. PROGRAM FOR LATTER HAS SO FAR CONSISTED OF SOME PUBLIC RELATIONS GESTURES LIKE DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE AND STATE VISITS BY SIAD BARRE AND BOUMEDIENE PLUS LARGE SUBSIDIES FOR ARMY OFFICERS AND OTHERS AND SHOWY INTEEST IN STARTING PROJECTS IN NORTH AND EAST. (MINCOMMUNICATION WILL INSTALL TELEPHONES IN MEDIEVAL WALLED CITY OF SAADA, FOR INSTANCE.) AMNESTY PROGRAM FOR VICTIMS OF HANDI HAS HELPED A HIGHLY PERSONAL AND CLAN CONSCIOUS AMBIANCE OF YEMEN.

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5. BUT FIRST MAJOR STEP CAME ONLY LAST WEEK WHEN, WITH LITTLE CONSULTATION AND NO ADVANCE WARNING GHASHMI ANNOUNCED NEW PEOPLE'S CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, COMPOSED OF NINETY-NINE MEN WHO HAVE BEEN DIRECTED IN A SECTION ON THEIR "BASIC FUNCTION" TO "PROPOSE FORM OF PRESIDENCY AMEND ARTICLES OF CONSTITUTION WHICH DO NOT CONFORM TO REQUIREMENTS OF PRESENT AGE AND SUBMIT THEM TO COMMAND COUNCIL, CARRY OUT FUNCTIONS OF (A) ELECTIONS COMMITTEE, (B) PREPARATORY COMMITTEE OF POPULAR ASSEMBLY AND (C) SCIENTIFIC COMMISSION FOR CODIFICATION OF SHARI'A LAWS."

6. THIS IS INTENDED GIVE CONSTITUTIONAL AND DEMOCRATIC TRAPPING TO GHASHMI WITHOUT GIVING 99 APPOINTEES ANY POWER WHATSOEVER.

7. ASSEMBLY ALSO HAS LONG LIST OF "COMPLEMENTARY FUNCTIONS" WHICH CONFER NO RPT NO MORE REAL POWER THAN SECTION ON "BASIC FUNCTIONS." IT CAN "SUBMIT COMMENTS ON DRAFT LAWS SENT TO IT BY COMMAND COUNCIL." IT CAN "REVIEW" GOVERNMENT'S DECLARATION ON BUDGET, AND "STUDY OTHER MATTERS (CONCERNING REFORM COMMITTEE, AUDIT BRANCH,

IMMIGRANTS CONFEDERATION AND INVESTIGATION DEPARTMENT)
WHEN SO INVITED BY COMMAND COUNCIL. ALSO, IF COMMAND
COUCIL CHAIRMAN REQUESTS, ASSEMBLY CAN SUBMIT COMMENTS
ON "FOREIGN AND LOCAL SITUATIONS" AND "ECONOMIC, SOCIAL,
EDUCATIONAL AND CULUTURAL QUESTIONS."

8.IT IS SUPPOSED TO LAST"TWO OR THREE YEARS" WITH NO
SESSION LASTING MORE THAN SIX MONTHS EACH YEAR AND BE-
GINNING AT A TIME CHOSEN BY THE COMMAND COUNCIL CHAIR-
AN.

9. ASSEMBLY IS APPENDAGE OF GHASHMI, IN SHORT. IT HAS AL-
MOST NO RELATIONSHIP TO GOVERNMENT EXCEPT THROUGH THE
NON-BINDING BUDGET REVIEW. IT CLEARLY MARKS THE END OF
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WHATEVER PLANS HAMDI HAD TO CREAT A PARTY, ALTHOUGH IT
MAY PRODUCE AN ELECTIONS LAW. HOWEVER,UNDER GHASHMI,
TO A FAR GREATER EXTENT THAN UNDER HAMDI, THE ARMY WILL
REMAIN THE ARBITER OF POWER, NOT SOME CIVILIAN ORGANIZA-
TION. INDEED, THIS MAY HAVE BEEN A LEADING MOTIVE IN
HAMDI SLAYING, WHICH WAS PRECEDED, AMONG OTHER THINGS,
BY ANNOUNCEMENT OF GROUP TO PREPARE FOR POPULAR CON-
FERENCE. GROUP CONTAINED NASIRISTS AND BAATHISTS.

10. IRONY IS THAT PRESENT GROUP OF NINETY NINE MEN ALSO
CONTAINS FEW "LEFTISTS." THERE IS, HOWEVER, LITTLE
QUESTION ABOUT LIMITS OF POWER AND ROLE OF SUCH MEN UNDER
GHASHMI. "FIRST MEETING"OF ASSEMBLY TO OCCUR BEFORE
END OF FEBRUARY AND ACCORDING TO LAWYER WHO PREPARED
REPUBLICAN DECREE, MEETING "WILL DECIDE ON INTERNAL
RULES AND CHOOSE SPEAKER, WHO WILL ABD AL-KARIM
AL-ARASHI." ARASHI IS QADI (RELIGIOUS JUDGE) WHO WAS
FINANCIAL ADVISER TO HAMDI AND KEY BUT CONSERVATIVE
MEMBER OF HIS INNER CIRCLE.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3863

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

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11. MOST STRIKING FEATURE OF NEW APPOINTEES IS THAT ONLY A HANDFUL (PERHAPS 5) COME FROM IMPORTANT NORTHERN TRIBAL CONFEDERATION OF HASHID AND THERE IS NO KNOWN ALLY OF HASHID LEADER, ABDALLAH BIN HUSAYN AL-AHMAR. MANY, PERHAPS MOST, ARE SHAYKHS WHO WERE IN PREVIOUS MAJLIS AS-SHURA, PROROGUED BY HAMDI. THERE ARE ALSO SOME QADIS, SOME MINISTERS AND OTHER OFFTS. MANY YEMENIS SAY IT IS A "COCKTAIL."

12. YEMENIS SHRUG AT ABSENCE OF POWERFUL AND PREVIOUSLY DISCONTENTED NORTHERN SHAYKHS. LIST WENT TO SAUDIS IN ADVANCE FOR APPROVAL, THEY SAY. ABDALLAH BIN HUSAYN ISN'T UNHAPPY, THEY SAY.

13. NEXT STEP, SAY SAME PERSONS, WILL BE CABINET SHUFFLE. PRIME MINISTER, WHO IS INTELLIGENT, HARD-WORKING, HONEST AND COMPLETELY SPINELESS MAN WILL REMAIN BUT SOME OTHER JOBS WILL BE SHIFTED AROUND. SOMEHOW GHASHMI HAS TO BRING ABDALLAH BIN HUSAYN INTO THE FOLD. NEW JOBS WILL PROBABLY FREE MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT MUHAMMAD SALIM BASINDWA TO DO JOB WHICH HAS BECOME MOST IMPORTANT FOR HIM AND REGIME, ADVISING PRESIDENT. HE IS RIDING HIGH THESE DAYS, APPARENTLY HAVING ESCAPED SHADOW OF ASNAJ FOR FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE. DEVELOPMENT TASKS, CONFIDENTIAL

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WHICH HE DOESN'T LIKE OR UNDERSTAND EXCEPT FOR GRAFT OPPORTUNITIES, WILL GO TO SOMEONE ELSE.

14. ONE CONSEQUENCE OF HAMDI ASSASSINATION IS THAT GOVERNMENT SLOWED DOWN FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, AND PLANS FOR CIVILIAN AGENCIES TO SPEND OVER \$350 MILLION OF ALMOST \$500 MILLION GOVERNMENT BUDGET FOR 77/78 WILL HAVE TO BE SHELVED. UNSPENT FUNDS, AS IN PAST, WILL PROBABLY GET TRANSFERRED OVER TO MILITARY WHERE LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY OR PROJECTS MAKES IT CONSIDERABLY EASIER TO DISBURSE MONEY. INFORMED SOURCES SAY THAT GHASHMI'S VERY HEAVY SPENDING ON MILITARY FRIENDS, HOWEVER, CAME FROM NON-YEMENI (READ SAUDI) SOURCE, SO CIVILIAN PROJECTS MAY BE JUST POSTPONED RATHER THAN STARVED. IN ANY CASE,

THERE IS NEED TO INVIGORATE GOVERNMENT AND CABINET
SHUFFLE MAY BE ONE WAY TO PROCEED.

15. BEYOND THAT WE DON'T SEE TOO MANY CHANGES.

SAUDIS MAY HAVE FIGURED ON SOVIETS DEPARTING SOMETIME
SOON, AT LEAST THE SOVIET MILITARY MISSION, BUT TWO NEW
PATROL BOATS FROM USSR ARRIVED IN JANUARY AND GHASHMI,
FOR WHATEVER REASONS, TOLD ASSEMBLED GROUP OF OFFICERS
THAT AMERICAN WEAPONS ARE ARRIVING "TOO SLOWLY" AND
REALLY CONSIST OF LITTLE BESIDES VEHICLES. HE SOUNDS LIKE
HAMDI. HE CERTAINLY ISN'T GOING TO CUT HIS TIES WITH
SOVIET UNION WHEN LATTER PROVES SO CAPABLE AND WILLING
TO BACK UP ETHIOPIA WHILE US DOES NOTHING. HE
FACES POSSIBILITY OF SIMILAR THREAT FROM SOVIET-BACKED
SOUTH YEMEN. "SIAD THREW OUT THE SOVIETS; LOOK WHAT
HAPPENED," SAID ASNAJ TO AMBASSADOR ON 13 FEBRUARY.
FOR MOMENT SOUTH OF YAR IS QUIET, BUT THREAT HANGS IN
AIR. GHASHMI'S MOVE TO RIGHT CAN BE CHECKED BY LEFTIST
SUBVERSION IN SOUTH.

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16. IT'S NOT CLEAR THAT GHASHMI CAN CARRY OUT PROGRAM
OF HIS OWN, ANYWAY. PUTTING ASIDE PEOPLE WHO DOUBT HE
HAS ANY RPT ANY IDEAS OF HIS OWN, THERE ARE OTHERS
WHO SAY HE IS CAPTIVE OF CLIQUE OF LT. COLONELS ALI
ABDALLAH SALIH, HAMUD QADINAH AND AHMAD FARRAJ, THE MEN
WHO ALLEGEDLY ACTUALLY MURDERED HAMDI. THIS GROUP
IS, ACCORDING TO ONE INFORMED SOURCE, VERY UNSO-
PHISTICATED POLITICALLY, EVEN MORE THAN GHASHMI.
AMBASSADOR WHO WAS INVITED LAST WEEK TO TWO PARTIES
WHERE HE MET ALL THREE MEN, REPORTS THAT THEY CAME
ACROSS COMPLETELY AS SELF-SEEKING, STRONG-WILLED BUT
ORDINARY OFFICERS WHO CHEW QAT AND DRINK IN EXPENSIVE
RESIDENCES.

17. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD (BUT CAN'T VERIFY) THAT THESE MEN
MUST PRETTY MUCH APPROVE MOST OF CHASHMI'S MAJOR
STEPS. THEY ARE, AT LEAST, HIS BASE OF POWER AND
WITH DEATH OF HAMDI, WHO NEVER KILLED ANYONE, GAME
ACQUIRED NEW AND CHILLING SET OF RULES. REGARDLESS OF
BACKING BY FEARSOME THREE, HOWEVER, GHASHMI HAS BEEN
CHALLENGED BY OTHER QUARTERS IN ARMY. ONE UNIT, IN
AMRAN, IS APPARENTLY STILL IN STATE OF DISOBEDIENCE.
GHASHMI'S SECURITY FOR MOVEMENTS AROUND TOWN IS NOW
EXTRAORDINARY. IT CONSISTS OF A CARAVAN OF UP TO A DOZEN
JEEP TOYOTAS, SOME WITH MOUNTED FIFTY CALIBER MACHINE
GUNS AND OTHERS WITH SQUADS OF SPECIAL BODYGUARDS. IT'S
PROBABLY PRUDENT. THERE HAVE BEEN UNCONFIRMED REPORTS
OF ATTEMPTS TO ASSASSINATE GHASHMI.

18. MEANWHILE, SHOW OF SOLIDARITY WITH COMMAND COUNCIL MEMBER ABDALLAH ABD AL-ALIM CONTINUES. THEY ARE PHOTOGRAPHED AT MEETINGS TOGETHER AND ABDALLAH MAKES CALLS ON GOVERNMENT OFFICES. DISTRUST AND DISLIKE NEVERTHELESS RUNS DEEP BETWEEN THEM, ACCORDING TO MOST REPORTS. THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE NO RPT NO CONFIDENTIAL

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LOVE BETWEEN THREE OFFICERS IN PARA 16 AND ABDALLAH ABD AL-ALIM. WE SUSPECT LATTER IS ON HIS WAY OUT, SOONER RATHER THAN LATER, BUT WE CANNOT GUESS HOW OR WHEN.

19. OUTSIDE ARMY GHASHMI HAS NO PARTICULAR FOLLOWING EXCEPT AMONG LEADING MERCHANTS WHO WERE AFRAID OF HAMDI AS CRYPTO-LEFTIST. PICTURES OF GHASHMI ARE REGULARLY DEFACED AROUND TOWN. RESULT IS THAT THERE ARE STILL MORE PHOTOS OF HAMDI THAN OF GHASHMI IN STORES. IN PLACES AS FAR-FLUNG AS MARIB AND SALIF, EMBASSY OFFICERS HAVE HEARD ORDINARY PEOPLE TALK MOURNFULLY OF HAMDI, ANGRILY OF GHASHMI. WITH NO INVESTIGATION OF ASSASSINATION TO POINT TO, HE IS ACCEPTED, IT AT ALL, AS SUCCESSFUL REGICIDE. THIS REPUTATION IS APPARENTLY WIDESPREAD. ONE VISITOR TO THIS EMBASSY WHO HAD BEEN TO ABU DHABI IN JANUARY WAS OPENLY TOLD BY SHAYKH ZAYID THAT GHASHMI KILLED HAMDI.

20. SO IT GOES. WE THINK GHASHMI IS BIDDING HIS TIME, WAITING UNTIL HE CAN PUSH EVENTS TO RIGHT. WE STILL DOUBT HE HAS BACKING OR PERSONALITY TO GO FAR IN THIS DIRECTION. HE IS STILL IN UNCERTAIN PERIOD OF TRANSITION.
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